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ABSTRACT

The paper presents a model of curriculum development and applies this model to education of the gifted in the Republic of South Africa. Strategies in curriculum development are classified as center-periphery (in which central authorities develop curriculum to be implemented at the local school level), school based (in which the same individuals both develop and implement the curriculum), and collaborative (which features teacher involvement in curriculum development conducted under the guidance of curriculum specialists). Other aspects discussed include the "seat" of curriculum development, the expertise required, and whether curriculum development is site specific or generic. Application of the model to education in South Africa shows that the present system of curriculum development is usually externally based, implemented as directed, and developed by experts other than classroom teachers. Schools developing their own gifted education curricula need to define a concept of giftedness, determine goals and content, design differentiation and teaching/learning strategies, and coordinate with existing organizational forms. (DB)

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PLANNING GIFTED EDUCATION : OPPORTUNITY FOR SCHOOL-BASED CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

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CURRICULUM AND METHODOLOGY

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A B S T R A C T

Different strategies may be followed to accomplish the task of curriculum development. These can be classified broadly as centre-periphery, collaborative and school-based. A more detailed classification can be made by identifying key dimensions in the process of curriculum development and representing these in matrix form. By means of this matrix it can be shown that the present system of curriculum development in the Republic of South Africa is to a large extent externally-based as regards the seat of curriculum development, is implemented as directed and is developed by making use of expertise in curriculum development and in school subjects of in most cases persons other than classroom teachers and/or of a very limited number of classroom teachers who are not representative of the various settings for which the curriculum is intended.

In view of this the question arises to what extent the provision of education for gifted pupils provides opportunities for school-based curriculum developmnet (SBCD). This is investigated by identifying basic characteristics of SBCD and using these as criteria to evaluate a generic curriculum model for gifted education.

Teachers who are professionally highly qualified are in a position to fulfil a wide range of professional tasks in the field of educational practice. Being involved in other educational tasks besides classroom teaching may contribute to a greater sense of fulfilment and professionalism in the teacher as well as to a higher status of the teaching profession. One such area in which teachers can become professionally involved is that of curriculum development. This paper briefly examines the possibilities which gifted education offers to schools and teachers for participating in curriculum development.

By means of a classification of curriculum development strategies it can be shown that the present system of curriculum development in South Africa does not reflect a school-based approach. It may therefore be of interest to determine to what extent the provision of education for gifted pupils provides opportunities for teachers for school-based curriculum development (SBCD). This will be investigated by firstly identifying and describing basic characteristics of SBCD. These characteristics will then be used as criteria to evaluate a generic curriculum model for gifted education in order to determine to what extent curriculum planning for the gifted provides opportunities for teachers to be involved in the kind of decision-making which is typical of SBCD.

1. CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

A curriculum development strategy may be described as a set of procedures designed to accomplish the curriculum development task. Many different sets of such procedures are possible. These may be categorized in various ways. One broad way of classifying these strategies is to locate them on a continuum in accordance with the degree of centralization of curriculum processes. One end of the continuum may then be characterised as a centre-periphery strategy or approach and the other as a school-based approach.

The most important characteristic of the centre-periphery approach is the separation of the functions of curriculum development and curriculum implementation. These functions are undertaken by two separate groups

of professionals linked by an often complex communication network, with the developers at the 'centre' and the implementers at the 'periphery' (1). This approach has decided advantages. It is most successful in cases where national coverage is desired and when formal agreement is possible about curriculum goals and content and about the educational standards to be achieved. In most cases formal external examinations are used in such a system. A further advantage is that experts can more readily be brought together in curriculum development teams.

A school-based curriculum development approach on the other hand is characterized by the fact that the curriculum developers are usually also the curriculum implementers. A more detailed description of SBCD is given in the next section.

There is a third middle of the road approach which combines elements of the centre-periphery and SBCD strategies which may be termed the collaborative approach. It features a significant degree of teacher involvement in curriculum development but is conducted under the guidance and in collaboration with 'external' development specialists (2). Collaborative curriculum development attempts to involve more teachers in all or many aspects of curriculum innovation. A certain organisational framework, however, is necessary in order to implement such an approach successfully.

Another way of classifying curriculum development strategies is to identify key variables in the process and in accordance with contrasting positions taken on these variables describe basic classes of strategies (3). Strategies vary with (a) where evidence is collected, consensus is established and consequences are projected (the seat of curriculum development); (b) who the participants are and what qualifications they possess (the expertise required); and (c) how much attention is paid to the realities of the intended use-setting for the curriculum (the teacher's role in the process (4).)

Different possibilities exist with respect to these three dimensions. The seat of curriculum development may be user-based or externally-based. Or stated in other terms: site-specific (local development under specific policy guidelines) or generic (in centres which develop for many localities but without particular policy guidelines from any of them). User-based,

site-specific curriculum development exists where development is organized and conducted at the direction of a local educational authority and where the resulting curriculum is to be used within the authority's area of jurisdiction. In contrast, generic, externally-based development is performed under the direction of some agency that does not have legal and administrative jurisdiction over a particular educational community and, therefore, cannot authorize for any particular setting the use of the curriculum it develops (5). According to Schwab (6) the expertise required for conducting curriculum development may be drawn from (a) subject matter scholars, (b) experts on the educational potential of pupils, (c) those knowledgeable on the social and cultural milieus in which education takes place, (d) persons familiar with teachers and teaching practices, and (e) specialists with knowledge of the curriculum development process itself. Curriculum development strategies vary in terms of the representation given each of these bodies of expertise in the decision-making process (7).

Forms of curriculum development also vary in terms of the extent to which the development process takes into account the realities of the actual setting for which a curriculum is intended. Short (8) identifies three different conceptions of curriculum use which determines the view taken of successful implementation, namely implementation as directed, the limited adaptation type and the open adaptation type. The crux of these variations in conceptions of curriculum use, according to Short, is in the latitude given to the teacher.

The three key variables of curriculum development identified by Short can be represented in matrix form and provide a systematic way of identifying several possible strategies that in different ways combine positions on the where, who and use-setting questions (9).

2. THE PRESENT SYSTEM OF CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN THE RSA

It is not possible with the time available to give a full explication of the system of curriculum development in the RSA. More detail is provided in chapter one of the Report of the Working Committee: Curriculating of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) investigation of education

(1981) which gives a survey of the present curriculum development situation in the RSA (10). This paper will be limited to relevant aspects as far as secondary education is concerned.

Curriculum development is coordinated by the Committee of Heads of Education (CHE) and its committees according to a procedure which was approved in 1980. According to this procedure the subjects of the secondary school are for research (development) purposes divided between the Provincial Education Departments. A Department appoints a research committee for a specific subject which has been allocated to it and this committee undertakes its own research and also considers proposals from other Provincial Education Departments and from interested and qualified bodies such as for example the Mathematical Association of South Africa (MASA). It then prepares a draft syllabus for consideration by the CHE. The CHE refers the proposed syllabus to an interdepartmental or a joint committee (in cases where with a view to university study the Joint Matriculation Board (JMB) is concerned). The relevant committee considers the proposed syllabus and draws up a concept syllabus which is submitted to the CHE. A new or revised syllabus is put before the Minister of National Education for approval for implementation at national level.

The research or project committee referred to above and which operates at provincial, i.e. regional level is supported by a work or study committee which includes amongst others teachers and university staff as members with an Inspector of Education as chairman. The teachers on the committee are in some cases teachers from schools who are participating in a curriculum research project and have in other cases in the past also been teachers who are well qualified and nearest to the head office of that particular Education Department and are not necessarily the best qualified teachers in the province for that task. A small number of teachers who do not serve on the committee may be selectively involved in formative evaluation of a draft syllabus. Core syllabuses developed according to this procedure for the RSA are within limits adapted by individual Education Departments for their own use. Nothing may be deleted from the core syllabus.

Provincial Education Departments may obtain exemption from external examinations from the JMB in respect of certain schools, individual schools or individual teachers,'who then have the opportunity to design their own curriculum subject to approval by the Education Department concerned. The Cape Department of Education conducted an experiment in this respect in the late seventies. The approach which was followed was never institutionalized. For further particulars see Walters (11). In the Transvaal Department of Education schools, however, a system of exemption which provides greater teacher involvement in curriculum development is operative.

Another recent development with respect to teacher participation in curriculum design is the opportunity given teachers to design their own curriculum for a section of a syllabus for example the new syllabus for Senior Secondary Physical Science (12).

The conclusion may be drawn that limited involvement of teachers in core curriculum development at regional and individual school level exists. The system of curriculum development may broadly be characterised as externally-based as regards the seat of curriculum development; directed implementation with limited account being taken of particular settings for which a curriculum is intended; and as development utilizing expertise in curriculum development and in school subjects of, in most cases, persons other than classroom teachers and/or of a very limited number of classroom teachers who are not representative of the various settings for which the curriculum is intended. Following on the De Lange Report (1981) and the White Paper on Education (1983) the system of curriculum development in the RSA is at present being investigated. Certain changes in the system are envisaged.

3. SCHOOL-BASED CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

The term school-based curriculum development has several meanings depending on the historical, legislative and administrative context of the educational systems in which shifts towards SBCD are occurring. In the case of

Australia three major trends in the field of education seem to stand out as factors which reinforced a move towards SBCD. First, there has been the general social move towards greater participation in decision-making. This has contributed to devolution of responsibility for certain kinds of decisions to schools and to decentralization of authority to both regions and schools. Second, there has been considerable re-thinking about the aims and purposes of education and the role of the school in response to general social change, including a growing recognition of the particular needs of local areas and of individual pupils. Third, there has been a growth in teacher professionalism (13). Many of these trends are also noticeable in South Africa. In Australia this has led to reappraisals of the highly centralised educational system, to varying degrees of administrative decentralisation and the devolution of some authority and power to the school level. This meant inter alia that schools now had the opportunity of exercising more control over their curriculum. This led to a modification of a traditional system of curriculum development emanating from a 'centre' of some kind to a more participatory form of decision-making. The term SBCD has become associated with this. School-based curriculum development may then be taken to mean "that process by which schools, whether in part or as a whole, exercise control and autonomy over 'what', 'why' and 'how' they are teaching in their schools, through the deliberate creation, selection or adaptation of curriculum materials to support the needs and strengths of pupils within their local context" (14). Skilbeck (15) points out that the SBCD movement acknowledges the role of national structures for curriculum but seeks recognition of the need to incorporate into these national structures a worked-out role for the school as a creative, developmental agency. It must be pointed out that SBCD is seen by some as a movement with ideological undertones. This view of SBCD however is not taken into account for the purposes of this paper.

In terms of Short's matrix SBCD may thus be categorized as follows: site-specific; milieus expert-dominated to balance-coordinated pattern; and open to limited adaptation.

For the purpose of this paper the following will be considered basic characteristics of SBCD and will be used as criteria:

- decentralized curriculum control
- teacher participation in curriculum decision-making
- recognition of the needs of local areas and of individuals

4. A MACRO-CURRICULUM MODEL FOR THE PLANNING OF GIFTED EDUCATION

In planning a broad or macro-curriculum for gifted pupils decisions have to be made with respect to basic curricular dimensions. The sum total of these decisions will determine the particular form of the curriculum. The following dimensions can be identified at macro-level: a concept of giftedness, goals and content, differentiation strategies, teaching-learning strategies and school organizational forms. This conceptualization of macro-curriculum planning is represented diagrammatically in figure 1. For further particulars see Taylor et al (16). The implementation and evaluation phases of curriculum development is excluded for present purposes.

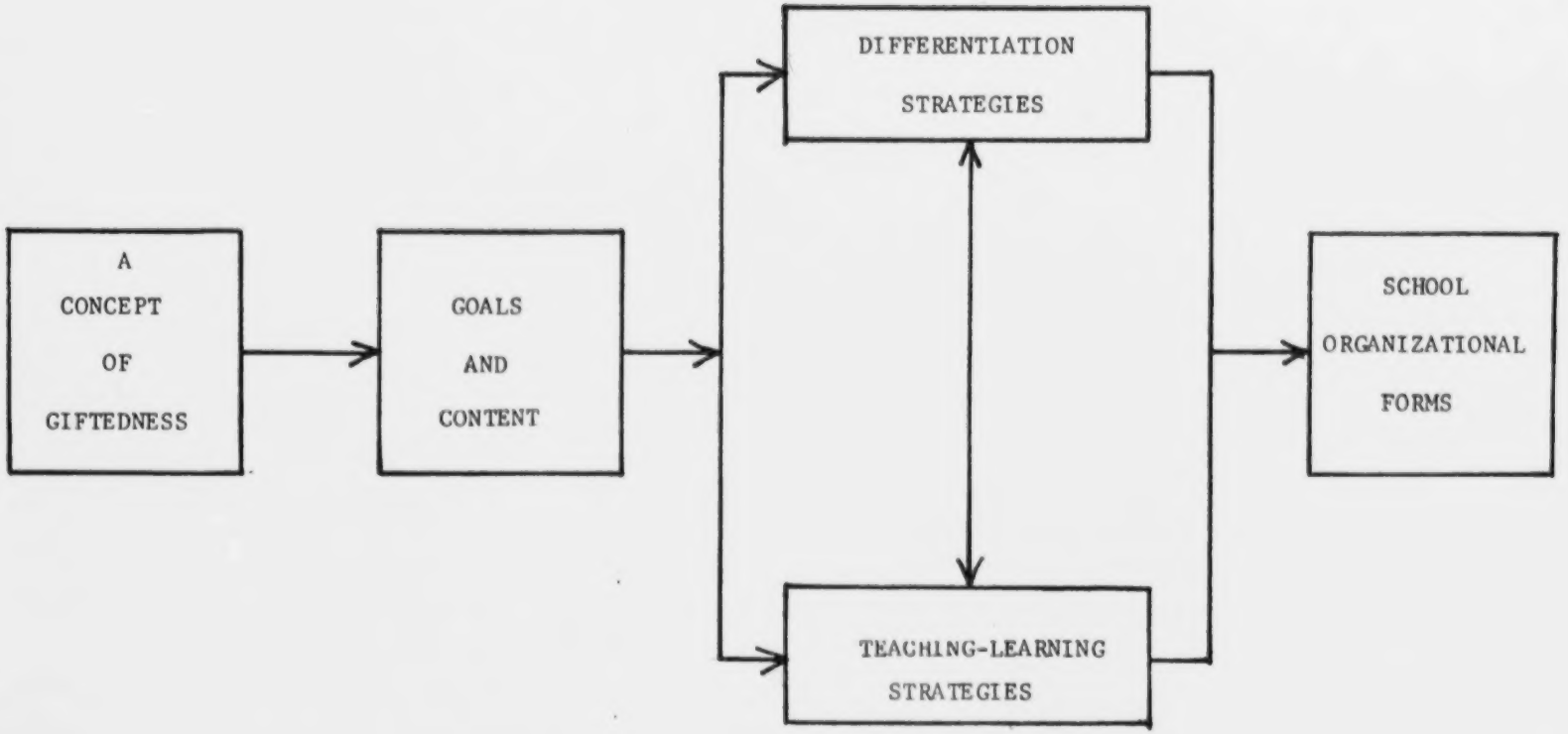

Fig. 1 : Dimensions of macro-curriculum planning
for gifted pupils

5. OPPORTUNITIES FOR SBCD IN PLANNING GIFTED EDUCATION

In order to determine the extent to which planning of education for the gifted in schools provides opportunities for SBCD the characteristics of SBCD which have already been identified will be used as criteria for evaluation. The object of evaluation, namely the process of planning the macro-curriculum has been analyzed and the basic dimensions with respect to which decisions have to be made represented in a model (fig. 1). The evaluation will focus mainly on secondary schools under the control of the Cape Department of Education.

5.1 A concept of giftedness

Provision for gifted education, as all other educational provision, is subject to the broad educational philosophy and principles which apply within a particular educational system. Within these limits the starting point for the planning of gifted education is a concept of giftedness. The Cape Department of Education lays down certain norms for the identification of the gifted. Teachers and local communities do not participate in this decision. By providing a model of identification the Department implicitly subscribes to and promotes a particular concept of giftedness.

5.2 Goals and content

When planning the curriculum decisions have to be made as to whether the cognitive or affective development of gifted pupils will be emphasized or a balanced approach followed. This decision will determine the scope and nature of the programme goals and objectives. Other than is the case with the normal academic programme the school has the freedom to determine goals and objectives for the gifted programme.

Furthermore, a syllabus is not prescribed by the education authority. Content or a field of knowledge becomes relevant depending on the interest of a pupil or group of pupils. Individuals' needs are therefore recognized. Teachers are closely involved in this as they

are the persons who help the pupils to finalize their fields of study and guide them in their investigations.

5.3 Differentiation strategies

Certain differentiation strategies may not be reconcilable with existing educational structures or may be of a kind that in the view of an Education Department calls for certain restrictive measures. The Cape Department of Education for example lays down certain criteria, conditions and procedures for accelerating pupils. Schools have a large degree of freedom, however, in deciding about other differentiation strategies such as grouping, individualization and enrichment. Local and individual needs can therefore be taken into account by schools.

5.4 Teaching-learning strategies

When planning a gifted programme teaching strategies have to be designed that create the type of learning situations that involve the gifted child in challenging and creative tasks, first-hand inquiry and problem solving activities. The term strategy is used to indicate that very careful thought must be given to the planning of the learning path along which the child must be guided to ensure that worthwhile learning takes place. Renzulli's triad model for example represents such a plan (17).

No one model is prescribed by the central authority. Teachers who become involved in a gifted programme have to be prepared to accept the challenge of choosing or designing their own teaching strategies. Local and individual needs can thus be taken into account when planning this dimension of the curriculum.

5.5 Organizational forms

A gifted programme has to be accommodated within an existing school organization. A way of implementing the programme in practice therefore has to be chosen which is reconcilable with the current

educational and school structure. Many different organizational forms are possible such as magnet classes, independent study and convocations. Limitations however exist with respect to the implementation of some forms, for example advanced placement which is not possible within the present educational system. The local situation may also act as constraint as far as certain resources and facilities may not be available. On the whole a school is free to decide on one or more organizational forms and can therefore adapt its programme in accordance with local conditions.

6. CONCLUSION

From this brief analysis it appears that judging by the degree of decentralized curriculum control, teacher participation and recognition of the needs of local areas and individuals, those schools and teachers who are involved in gifted education have more opportunities for what may be termed school-based curriculum development than would otherwise be the case.

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